

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Reading and Writing

## What is the relationship between language and reading and writing skills?

There is a strong relationship between language, reading and writing. Hearing children usually start school with a strongly developed language; they know how language works, they know how it fits together to make correct sentences, they know the purpose of language and they have many words to express themselves. Language has given them a link to the outside world and through language they will have developed a strong general knowledge base. They can question, debate, argue and reason and use language to control the world around them.

It is these language skills which the teacher will use when teaching reading and writing. The children will use their language skills as a springboard into literacy, and the more they read and write, the greater their reading, writing and language skills become.

If language skills are delayed for any reason, literacy will also be affected. The degree to which literacy is affected depends on the degree of language delay.

## Deaf children and written expression

Sometimes deaf children will have errors in grammar, tenses and word endings. Writing sentences with correct sentence structure depends on having an understanding of how our language fits together. Deaf children show through their written work that they may have gaps in their understanding of how language works.

Deaf children will often need repetition of correct usage of different sentence structures so they can gain a clear understanding of how words fit together to make sentences correctly. They will need to have encouragement so they gain confidence in written expression.

Often deaf children prefer to write about facts they know rather than to use their imagination. There is some evidence that young deaf children may have limited opportunities for imaginary play and this limits the development of their imagination. Reading requires imagination as each word adds to the picture building in the reader's mind.

For further information about Deaf Children Australia visit our website,  
[www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au](http://www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au)

Helpline 1800 645 916 Email [helpline@deafchildren.org.au](mailto:helpline@deafchildren.org.au)

Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.

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## Deaf children and reading

Deaf children, like hearing children, need to learn how to read and understand stories, passages and sentences from all subjects in school. They have to be able to distinguish the important facts and ideas from words they are reading and identify which words are unimportant. Sometimes this is difficult for deaf children because they are reading words or sentences they cannot understand. Some deaf children will simply read each word, without understanding the meaning of what the words are conveying.

It is important to check they understand what they are reading by questioning the child on the vocabulary, asking them to repeat the passage in their own words, asking them to draw or act it out and/or by asking the child questions about what they have read.

## What are some ideas for developing deaf children's enthusiasm for reading and writing?

- Read books to the deaf child everyday. The books should be age appropriate and interesting. Reading together will improve the child's vocabulary, develop visual skills and assist in reading comprehension. They will begin to develop a love of books. This can be varied by asking the child to read a section, and then adults read a section, or both can both read at the same time.
- Don't put pressure on your child to read books which are too difficult or if they really don't want to. Instead let your child know indirectly that reading is encouraged, for example, let them stay up a little later on the condition that they read.
- Encourage an enjoyment of reading by sharing the book together and talking, commenting on and questioning the story as it is read.
- Make a journal. Each day, write a short passage about anything at all, something experienced, something which will happen, something noticed, etc. The deaf child reads what is written, and then writes back. Don't correct the spelling, punctuation or grammar in this journal. It is simply a "communication book" to support the development of positive attitudes towards reading and writing.
- Write notes to the deaf child instead of telling them what is wanted. Ask them to write a note in reply. Write down where they will find a surprise.
- Read a story together and then together, use the theme of the story to make a new version or a new ending.
- Let your child dictate a story and you write it down or type it on the computer. Check frequently with your child that the meaning is correct. Ask your child to read the story along as you write it down.
- Your child can illustrate the story if they wish to. Keep these in a special folder for reading together later.

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- Your child can write about pictures, photos, write letters, emails and shopping lists.
- Be a role model. Let the child see adults enjoy reading. Provide plenty of reading material, both for enjoyment and reference, in the home and make sure there is a special place for the deaf child's books. Join the local library and visit often.
- Establish a "reading time" for a short period each day to focus only on reading. Make it pleasurable.
- Turn off the television and read instead.
- Always watch the television or DVDs with captions.

## Resources

<http://eric.indiana.edu/www/indexfr.html>

*How Can I Improve My Child's Reading?*

This site is from America and gives some tips for families to improve their children's reading skills.

<http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Products/Perspectives/may-jun99/index.html>

*"Perspectives in Education and Deafness"*

This is an online edition of a journal published in America on teaching deaf children. This edition focuses on practical ideas to foster reading skills.

<http://www.deafnessatbirth.org.uk/contents/3/3.5/3.5.a/index.html>

*Early literacy and numeracy - laying the foundations*

This is an English site and it gives a good guide for parents to assist them in developing skills their deaf child will need for reading

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/0278/ia/litc.htm>

*Department of Education, Tasmania*

This site is a links page to literacy resources on the web from around the world.

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